

# **Second Year Presentation Classes: An Approach To Developing Communication Fluency**

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## **Introduction**

The phrase "presentation class" has different meaning for different groups. However, the general meaning is that in a presentation class, students are exposed to different communication skills and styles. These classes provide students with communicative experiences that should enhance improve knowledge and attitudes in oral communication, thus helping them build self-confidence, critical thinking and organization of thoughts and ideas through research

The second year presentation classes in the Department of World Englishes at Chukyo University were implemented in 2002. The course was originally planned as OC, but since the department already had another OC program, the Ministry of Education (Monbusho) didn't allow it and so it was changed to Presentation Class.

According to James D'Angelo, a full time teacher and coordinator of the Presentation classes, the overall aim / goal was to help students develop the ability to speak in front of peers / teachers using their own language. The other goal was what Paroo Nihalani calls 'social acceptability' in his paper on '**Speech as a Social Mode of Interaction**' (2003) and this is what he means by **social acceptability**:

In learning a second / foreign language, a student is usually faced with certain kinds of problems: new sounds, new lexical items, and new syntactic patterns. But even if a second language learner can pronounce his second language sounds correctly and put words together in a proper order, he still has to use the language in a social context. He has to internalize the 'rules of the game', i.e. he must know when to talk and when to keep silent, how loud to talk and with what intonation, what constitutes a polite request and what a refusal, how to initiate a conversation and how to end one, etc.. in order to make himself 'acceptable' in the society. (page 28)

In short, the aim was to give students opportunities to learn how to present themselves and develop social interactions through the gathering of, evaluation and use of information

effectively.

## Curriculum

The presentation classes have three different types of presentations for each semester. In the first semester the students are required to cover the following presentation types;

- (i) Show and Tell.
- (ii) Informative Speech
- (iii) Debate

The show and tell speeches are for three minutes and the informative speeches are for five minutes. The process of doing the debate is the longest and more involving of the three presentations and the class is divided into four some, with a pair of students on each side, pro and con of a particular issue. Topic selection is done by students.

Each class discusses different topics and then chooses several of which four resolutions are finally chosen. The students debate each other on these resolutions. The pairing of the students depends on the teacher. For example, Brian Herschler and Jon Moore allow their students to choose pairs or teams by themselves. In my class, students pick numbers or Candy and this decides the groups. I use this method to avoid students just picking only their friends, and thus students who are quiet or have no close friends in the class are not left out. The format of the actual debate was the same because of the final week inter-class debate. All sections of this class debate the same four issues. Each pair has four minutes in the opening minutes to state their main arguments. Then they have a two minute break to think over the main arguments before the rebuttal. They do the rebuttal for four minutes each pair and take another two minute break and then the final defense.

The process of doing the debates is perhaps more demanding compared to the other two presentations because they require students to form opinions and analyze the implications and decisions of different resolutions. Also each student, whether they can speak fluently or not, is put in a position in which he or she must use his or her own language to think and defend his / her opinion, and listen to what others are saying in order to refute their ideas in the rebuttal time.

In the final week, all the positives (pros) debated all the negatives (cons) from another class through a rotation system. At the start of the year students are given a placement test which streams students according to ability. However, I don't know exactly how the inter-group debates were decided, but I felt that the English ability of students in group one was too low compared to group 6, and they were unable to form opinions or quickly analyze, do a good rebuttal, or even defend their own opinion when it was refuted. One of the group one student commented that she was shocked at how well group 6 students were at using

English and she felt that they should debate students with same level English.

In the second semester, the students cover the following presentation types;

- (i) Demonstration Speeches
- (ii) Movie Reviews
- (iii) Team Product Marketing Project.

The Demonstration Speeches and Movie Reviews are for five minutes. The Team Product Marketing Project is a persuasive group project and just like the debates, is also very demanding. The only difference between the two is that in the Team Product Marketing, students work as a team of three or four and come up with a proposal of either a new product, form a non-profitable organization or a Tour Company etc. In Brian Herschler's class students make a proposal for a public service commercial, like stopping drug Abuse. The rationale is for students to explain why they are doing the commercial, who is it for and what the commercial hopes to achieve or accomplish. The overall goal is for each presentation to persuade and convince listeners (board members- peers / teachers) to get interested and accept the plan. For example, if the group's proposal is a 'new food restaurant: they can discuss and do market research, look into competing restaurants in the area, the menu and pricing, building design and atmosphere, advertising etc.. The students need to do a lot of research and depending on what they propose to do, they may need to visit some actual companies and ask for information. Students are required to use Power Point for this presentation. By using Power Point, students develop independent thinking rather than the memorization or reading of notes during presentation. They learn to use Power Point information (graphics, tables, charts and photos) to guide their speeches and they are not allowed to have any other notes except the outline and what is on the screen. James D'Angelo commented about the use of the Power Point that it is a key part of the curriculum, that students for all presentations are required to use note cards with bullets, so they are forced to expand on those while presenting. Brian Herschler also commented that during these presentations, students are not just learning about Power Point, but using the skill in a real world (simulated) activity. There is no standardized assessment form for evaluating student's presentations. Each individual teacher is responsible for their class evaluation using their own teaching methods. However, I feel that some kind of communication would be good between teachers for moral support and sharing of ideas.

## **Final Thoughts**

Giving speeches or presentations in front of peers / teachers is a very sophisticated communicative activity and is both a complex and emotionally challenging experience, even for native speakers of English (David Harrington & Charles LeBeau, Speaking Of Speeches,

Introduction). Many students are shy and scared to death about speaking in public or in front of others. Presentation is a powerful tool to help students overcome these fears because it offers them the opportunity to engage and interact with different types of presentation activities like reading (research), writing (speeches), listening and evaluating (other students) and speaking (their presentations). There are plans next year to change one of the presentations to 'Group Discussions' to give students more opportunities to share their ideas and experiences in a group.

What do students actually learn in these classes? Some students and teachers may think that these classes are designed to shift the teaching responsibilities from the teacher to the students. It maybe so, but each presentation style requires a different approach and student forget this no matter how many times you explain and give examples. However, as a teacher I have a responsibility to give guidance on their presentation skills and prepare them for the reality of real communication outside of class. Students learn a lot and I have noticed that serious students do demonstrate a clear understanding of what they are supposed to do and enjoy presenting their ideas and creativity, while others show little interest because they think it is too difficult or they are too busy with other things and never spend time preparing and are therefore unable to articulate their own opinions orally or do a good quality presentation. In the first semester, I asked students what their impressions were about their presentations. They all commented that preparing for presentation was hard work and they lacked time for preparation, but they agreed that they learned to express themselves and that these were useful and important skills for the future.

By standing in front of their peers and present, they learn to have confidence and faith in their abilities even for those students who just want to get by. They learn organizational techniques like the importance of a good clear introduction, providing more details and support in the main body and conclusion in order to give a well organized intelligent speech. For example, doing the debates, they learn to respond to a well reasoned argument. Michael Lubetsky, Charles LeBeau and David Harrington in *Discover Debate* state that, "debate assumes a high level of discourse skill because along the way, we learn how to support opinions with reasons, how to support reasons with evidence, ... learn how to refute explanations, how to challenge evidence, ... and finally learn how to make rebuttal arguments" (notes to the teacher). A presentation is something that you do in front of an audience, so students learn to consider the audience in choosing a topic whether the topic would be interesting and informative or boring. Will the audience learn new information? etc. In a speech, it is imperative that ideas go together and make sense. Students learn the importance of using transition phrases to link main ideas together and introduce new information. In short they learn to think analytically about the issues. They learn to do research (even though some students found it to be hard work). I can confidently conclude that, the presentation classes

at Chukyo are preparing and training students with skills for actual English communication in the world.

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